

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 3616

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SUBJ: THE WEEK IN COLOMBIA

1. BEGIN SUMMARY. THE END OF THE SPECIAL SESSION OF THE CONGRESS AND THE IMMINENT DEPARTURE FOR WASHINGTON OF AMBASSADOR-DESIGNATE AND DESIGNADO (VICE PRES) JULIO CESAR TURBAY PRESAGED A SLOWDOWN IN POLITICAL ACTIVITY FOR THE NEAR-TERM FUTURE. THE CONGRESS, BEFORE ADJOURNING, COMPLETED ACTION ON THE RESTRUCTURING OF THE COMPTROLLER GENERAL'S OFFICE. THE FINAL DAYS OF THE SESSION WERE, IN ACCORDANCE WITH LOCAL TRADITION, MARKED BY NUMEROUS DISPLAYS OF LIBERAL PARTY DISUNITY. JULIO CESAR TURBAY, FRONTRUNNER FOR THE 1976 LIBERAL PARTY PRESIDENTIAL NOMINATION, TOOK COGNIZANCE OF THE DIVISIVE EFFECTS CAUSED BY HIS PRESIDENTIAL DRIVE WHEN, AT A TESTIMONIAL DINNER, HE STATED THAT HE BELIEVED THAT HE COULD BETTER SERVE COLOMBIA AND THE LIBERAL PARTY BY BEING ABSENT FROM COLOMBIA, A POINT OF VIEW THAT HAS FREQUENTLY BEEN LESS FORMALLY STATED BY OTHER LIBERAL PARTY LEADERS. PRES LOPEZ UNDERScoreD HIS INTENTION TO AVOID USE OF A "STATE OF SIEGE" WHEN, ON THURSDAY, HE ANNOUNCED THAT HE WOULD GO TO THE PUBLIC SQUARES TO DEFEND REPUBLICAN INSTITUTIONS. END SUMMARY.

2. CONGRESS GIVES PRESIDENT AUTHORITY TO REORGANIZE THE COMPTROLLER GENERAL'S OFFICE. RESPONDING TO AN APPEAL FROM PRESIDENT LOPEZ
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(BOGOTA 3340) THE CHAMBER OF REPS PASSED A BILL APRIL 15

REFORMING THE COMPTROLLER GENERAL'S OFFICE, INCLUDING PROVISION GRANTING THE PRESIDENT AUTHORITY TO INITIATE INTERNAL PERSONNEL CHANGES. SINCE THE SENATE HAD PREVIOUSLY APPROVED THE BILL, THE ACTION OF THE CHAMBER ENDED CONSIDERATION OF THE BILL, AND THUS ENDED THE EXTRAORDINARY SESSION OF CONGRESS. SEVERAL LIBERAL REPS, IN VOTING FOR THE BILL STATED THAT THEY WERE VOTING FAVORABLY ONLY BECAUSE OF THE PRESIDENT'S APPEAL, AND CALLED FOR A LIBERAL PARTY CONVENTION PRIOR TO THE ORDINARY SESSION OF CONGRESS, BEGINNING JULY 20, INDICATING THEIR DISENCHANTMENT WITH THE CURRENT PARTY LEADERSHIP. THESE LIBERALS, INCLUDING MOST OF THE 65 LIBERAL FRESHMEN REPS ALSO REITERATED THEIR INTENTION TO ELECT A LIBERAL AS THE NEXT COMPTROLLER GENERAL, IN SPITE OF PRES LOPEZ' OFT-REPEATED CAMPAIGN PLEDGE TO SUPPORT A CONSERVATIVE FOR THE POSITION. LIBERAL AND CONSERVATIVE PARTY LEADERS MET APRIL 17, AND REPORTEDLY REACHED AN AGREEMENT WHICH WOULD ALLOW THE LIBERAL MAJORITY IN THE CHAMBER (113 OF 199 MEMBERS) TO ELECT THE PERSON OF THEIR CHOICE WITHOUT OPPOSITION FROM THE CONSERVATIVES, WHOSE EFFORTS WOULD PROBABLY PROVE FRUITLESS ANYHOW. THE CONSERVATIVES APPARENTLY BELIEVE THAT THE COMPTROLLER GEN ISSUE IS NOT ONE THAT THEY COULD USE EFFECTIVELY TO DIVIDE THE LIBERAL PARTY WHICH CONTINUED TO SHOW SIGNS OF STRAIN WITHOUT ANY PROMPTING.

3. LIBERAL PARTY TROUBLES CONTINUE. THE LIBERAL REBELLION IN THE CHAMBER OVER THE COMPTROLLER GEN BILL DURING RECENT WEEKS AND THE PENDING ELECTION OF THE NEXT COMPTROLLER GENERAL INDICATE THE CONTINUING DISUNITY OF THE PARTY. HARDLY ANYONE SEEMS SATISFIED WITH THE LIBERAL PARTY DIRECTORATE (DNL) CONSISTING OF SENATORS GUSTAVO BALCAZAR, JUAN JOSE TURBAY, AND VICTOR MOSQUERA CHAUX, AND THE CALL FOR A LIBERAL PARTY CONVENTION FOR EARLY JULY MADE BY FRESHMEN CONGRESSMEN DURING DEBATE ON THE COMPTROLLER GENERAL BILL APPEARED TO HAVE GAINED WIDESPREAD SUPPORT BY THE END OF THE WEEK. PRIOR TO THE CONVENTION, THESE FRESHMEN WILL HOLD A MEETING TO PLAN STRATEGY TO REORGANIZE PARTY ACTIVITIES IN THE CONGRESS AND TO INCREASE THEIR POWER. MIN OF JUSTICE ALBERTO SANTOFIMIO, WHO HAS BEEN RUMORED TO BE CONSIDERING RESIGNING BECAUSE OF ALMOST CONTINUOUS CONTROVERSY OVER HIS POLITICAL ACTIVITIES SINCE HE TOOK OFFICE, APPEARED BY WEEK'S END TO BE CLOSER THAN EVER TO RESIGNING. FOLLOWING AN OPEN DISPUTE IN HIS DEPARTMENT (TOLIMA) WITH BACKERS OF SENATOR CONFIDENTIAL

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RAFAEL CAICEDO ESPINOSA OVER CHARGES THAT SANTOFIMIO HAS USED HIS OFFICE TO BROADEN HIS POLITICAL BASE, SANTOFIMIO SAID THAT IF HE RESIGNED "IT WOULD BE WITH PRESIDENT LOPEZ' CONCURRENCE". MEANWHILE, SENATE PRES TURBAY, WHO LEAVES SHORTLY TO BE AMBASSADOR THE THE US, AND AROUND WHOM MANY OF THE LIBERAL PARTY PROBLEMS CENTER, HOPED IN A SPEECH AT A BANQUET IN HIS HONOR THAT HIS ABSENCE FROM COLOMBIA WOULD GIVE THE COUNTRY AND THE PARTY A BREATHER. "I BELIEVE THAT I CAN BETTER SERVE THE GOVERNMENT

AND THE PARTY OUT OF THE COUNTRY", HE SAID, WHILE AT THE SAME TIME DISCOUNTING CHARGES OF HIS ALLEGED INFLUENCE; "I HAVE NEVER SOLICITED FROM ANY PRESIDENT A PERSONAL POLITICAL (PATRONAGE)". FINALLY, PRES LOPEZ SAID APRIL 17 THAT HE WOULD DEFEND PUBLICLY DURING THE NEXT SEVERAL WEEKS THE ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF HIS ADMINISTRATION, AND COLOMBIAN DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS. THE DECISION OF THE PRESIDENT MAY INDICATE THAT HE WILL ASSUME THE ROLE OF DE FACTO PARTY LEADER, IN SPITE OF HIS STATED INTENTION NOT TO GET INVOLVED IN PARTY POLITICS, AND MAY ALSO BE DESIGNED TO DAMPEN PUBLIC CONCERN OVER CRIMINAL AND GUERRILLA VIOLENCE.

4. GUERRILLAS QUIET. THERE WAS NO SIGNIFICANT GUERRILLA ACTIVITY DURING THE WEEK. THE PUBLIC REMAINED CONCERNED, HOWEVER, OVER SECURITY AND PRESSURES ON PRES LOPEZ TO PROCLAIM A STATE OF RTSIEGE WILL PROBABLY CONTINUE. LOPEZ WILL PROBABLY CONTINUE TO RESIST THESE PRESSURES, AS LONG AS THERE IS NO SERIOUS INCREASE IN GUERRILLA ACTIVITY.
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